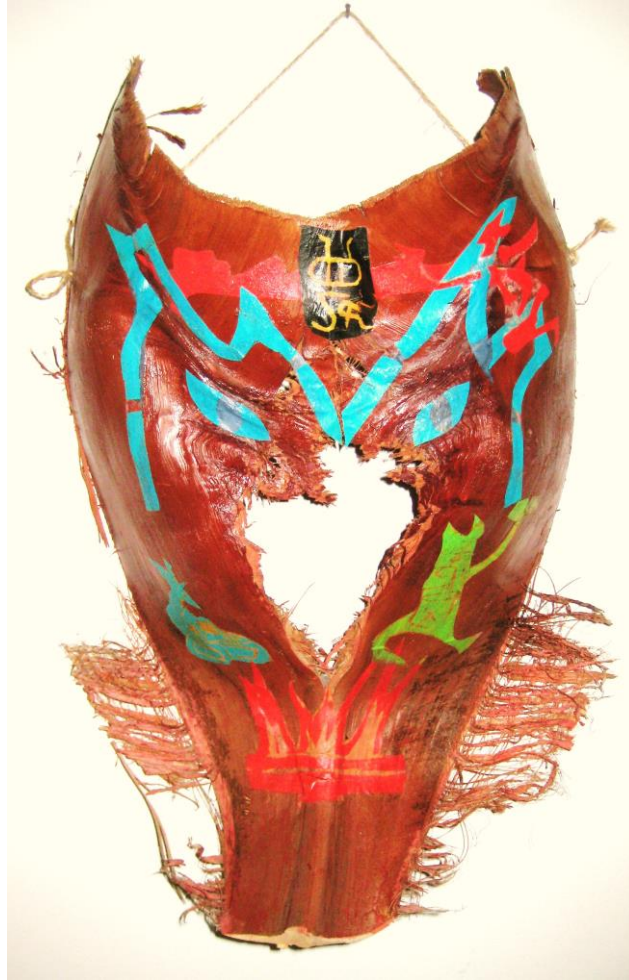


The Mirror of Divination



Stephen Karcher, Ph.D.

When you hear the word divination, chances are that certain images will spring to mind: gypsy fortune-tellers peering into reading crystal balls or reading tea leaves and the lines on your palm; mediums wrapped in white robes uttering mystic spirit messages while manipulating Ouija boards; internet psychics telling you about tall dark strangers while they ask for your credit card number; a scene in a movie when a character draws the Tarot Trump Death; witch doctors and old crones chanting around a fire in

the middle of a primitive forests. If you look a little deeper you might see another kind of lurking image, dark magicians in graveyards seeking forbidden knowledge by conjuring demons and the spirits of the dead.

These images express attitudes with a long history. For well over a thousand years looking into the mirror of divination was considered a mortal sin and a capital crime. The Imperial Church called it a conversation with the Devil and banished it along with the old gods and wise women of pagan culture. Then, with the rise of modern positivistic science, the outcast devils became superstitions, tales told by the marginal, primitive, uneducated or insane.

A Lost Way of Knowing

In spite of the fear, condescension and prejudice it calls up in mainstream modern culture, the practice of divination is not devil-worship or a collection of superstitions but a very old and unique Way of Knowing, one of the oldest and most deeply embedded human acts. There is virtually no human culture that has not used this “mirror that reveals truth” to open a dialogue with the invisible spirit-world that surrounds us. Countless people throughout the world – kings and queens, generals, adventurers and entrepreneurs, seekers of healing or justice, artists, sages, spiritual leaders and those simply trying to lead a happy life have sought and continue to seek its strange mixture of practical advice and knowledge of the workings of Fate. What we see as a pile of superstitious rubbish is actually a rich archeological site, ready to open the treasures and mysteries of time and meaning.

For there is a lost world hidden behind the Mirror of Divination, a world ensouled and alive with spirit. It is full of imaginative forces large and small with lessons to teach and tolls to pay, messages that cut across the boundaries we have set up to divide what is important from what is unimportant. Recognizing these forces and giving them the attention they

need to play an active part in our lives again is perhaps the greatest healing act that divination has to offer.

What do we do when we divine?

Divination does not simply answer questions. It opens what we might call the Mythological Memory or Sage-Mind in a unique way, through the individual mystery of what Jung called synchronicity. In doing so, it reveals otherwise inaccessible information that can restore the harmony necessary to live a productive and fulfilling life.

This is a quest for meaning through extraordinary kinds of perception and communication, re-creating the myth-time as a “non-locality” that structures and gives significance to life. Through the special bond between diviner and inquirer, the act of divination becomes a quest for meaning focused on the “why” of a problem and the means necessary to re-establish well-being.

This Way of knowing is a survival of ancient paradigms of thought that reflect the deep human capacity, shared with animals, to access information not directly available to normal consciousness. Taking this seriously can be threatening, for the numinous and paradoxical images we see in the mirror of divination lead us into terra incognita. They are a challenge to live life truthfully, a Way of Knowing designed to provide us with information about the “on-going process of the Real.”

The Theatre of Divination

In traditional practice throughout the world divinatory healing does not depend on logic, piety or analysis but on a unique kind of enacted reality involving dramaturgical elements called up by the spirits involved that are acted or “read out” during the divinatory process. These dramatic elements -

altered speech, ritual, chant, visualization and invocation - set the stage and mark the entrances and exits of both spirit-entities and human participants.

The action traditionally takes place at the Outskirts Altar, a metaphorical place between the civilized and the wilderness, day and night, inner and outer, a place that links events in the body and psyche with events in the natural and spiritual worlds. Throughout the performance there are acts of tying and untying, binding and loosening, blocking and casting off, ritual actions powered by spoken words.

The unique power of this divinatory language synthesizes multiple sources of information to produce a special speech code or register that lets normally inaudible beings of the Other World be heard. It is deployed through a combination of symbolic objects, spirit-helpers and animal masks through the “performative linguistic act”, a psycho-physiological performative mode that acts as a vehicle for cross-world communication. This performative mode de-centers normal identity and its logical connections. It compensates what is over or under-developed, radically shifts perspectives, demolishes moral dichotomies and suggests new ways of standing in the world that can lead to the direct experience of meaning. Through this mode the Diviner acts as a mediator between worlds and translator of messages, the director of a complex and sophisticated healing drama.

The Divinatory Moment

The inspiration that divination provides is based in a willingness to accept information from sources beyond the direct control of rational process, product of a split-trance state that incorporates rational and analytical thought and internal primary processes. It involves multi-sensorial processing, synesthesia, sensory overload and altered states of consciousness. It makes use of dramaturgical elements such as power-words, sonic driving and visualizations constructed in the occipital lobe of

the brain to induce a state like dreaming, effecting a shift from habitual behavior and a heightening of physical perception.

Most practicing diviners in traditional cultures call this kind of activity “talking with spirits,” a sort of “animism” that connects us with autonomous operations in brain and mind that animate the world with identity and intentionality. “Talking with spirits” allows the diviner and the inquirer to experience ways of knowing that are otherwise unconscious, establishing behavioral, nonverbal and emotional communication with the symbolic functions that are “architects of dreams and symptoms” by accessing nonverbal information channels of the limbic brain and lower brain centers. In divinatory language these “symbolic functions” or brain processes are called *daimones*, *xiang* or Dream Animals, imaginal creatures intimately connected with the body that hunger to be a part of our lives. Divination sees these Dream Animals as the carriers of our “soul,” our ancestral mentors and brethren. They can bring the world alive if we sincerely bid them welcome.

Technically, the divinatory moment when we talk with these spirits results in the production of slow-wave brain discharges in the connections between the limbic system and brain stem regions. These synchronizing brain waves (high-voltage slow-wave EEG activity, especially theta waves at 3-6 cycles per second) connect attention mechanisms in the lower and limbic brains to produce ascending discharge patterns. These discharge patterns synchronize the different levels of the deep brain and link them to the frontal lobes, integrating information from lower brain levels into the processing capacity of the frontal cortex, particularly nonverbal emotional and behavioral information.

This deep connective process provides intuition, understanding, enlightenment, a sense of unity and personal integration. It establishes a

basis for communication across domains of experience by engaging the complex self-representational capacity that underlies dreaming. This close engagement of ego-identity with the operational systems of the unconscious gives us access to an unconscious personality, a sort of Dream Ego that can be managed and healed through ritual enactment.

A Dialogue with Fate

The ritual drama of divination addresses individual problems in a unique way by mediating a transaction with the unknown. It can shape a new relation between the individual and collective emotional structures by providing symbols that have psychological effects, therapeutic consequences and spiritual dimensions.

In contrast to stable and normative cultural values, the drama of divination implies an ability to modify what has been called karma through ritual activity. Through this sort of participatory drama, we are exposed to spiritual knowledge at a time of crisis. This can alter the course of events by modifying our relation to the impersonal forces that affect us for better or worse.

Divination portrays our experience and identity as a field of actors, possibilities and forces, letting us make a deliberate response to these forces rather than being their victim. Its unique power works in and through its symbols (*xiang*), the “living cognitive units” or Dream Animals embedded in its motifs, metaphors and proverbs. These cognitive units place us in the broader context of both cultural and cosmic renewal, a spiritual logic that we can use to make sense of our lives. They provide for a new and effective personal narrative, a story that makes our individual suffering intelligible.

Divination, Language and Initiation

The oracular sense of the unseen which characterizes these ancient ways of knowing rests on a tension in language. Divination transforms “ordinary” words into clusters of image which indicate the presence of *daimones*, spirits or Gods. This linguistic shift links divination with the *mysteria*, the Mystery Cults which were the characteristic form of Pagan religion.

These cults were a Way of Initiation characterized by the word *mystikos*, referring to the time filled with sacred events and to the participants who are changed by the experience. It suggests the sensuous atmosphere of a nocturnal festival, entering a darkness that joins the dead and the living. The source of this atmosphere is seen in the verb which lies behind the words for the initiate (*mystes*) and for the *mysterion* or sacred time: *myein*, “to close the mouth or eyes.” Participants in the mysteries close their eyes, fall back, as it were, into their own inner darkness where the ritual procedures open an inner mythic vocabulary, giving the initiate a way to see in the underworld of the psyche. Through this ritual of darkness - the darkness of Hades - each person finds an origin in the stories of the Gods. This experience changes fate, our relation to the psychic images that *are* human fate. It is an epiphany of the Gods that changes the *mystes* with eyes veiled and closed into a kind of seer.

***Kairos*: A Message for Our Times**

Writing in 1951 on “The Undiscovered Self,” C. G. Jung remarked on what he saw as a “peculiarity of our time.” We are living in what the Greeks called the *kairos*, he said, the right moment for a metamorphosis of the Gods, of the fundamental principles and symbols. This peculiarity of our time, which is certainly not of our conscious choosing, is “the expression of the unconscious man within us who is changing.”

The word *kairos* or critical moment represents a particular connection of fate, soul and the individual, a place where the Gods weave critical events into our bodies. The meanings of the word include the shifting openings in bronze plate armor at which an archer aimed to pierce the life within, openings in battle groups and openings in fortifications through which an attack could be made. Another root links the word to the openings in the vertical web of a shuttle loom, openings which last for a limited time and through which the horizontal woof-thread must be shot. The vertical warp-threads in the Loom of Time were seen as human spinal cords, with the head or psyche hanging down as a loom-weight, while the horizontal woof-thread was the “thread of the Gods”. The crossings of these threads, the *kairoi*, were fatal moments which transfix each life.

These snares which cannot be avoided, these fates that drag us down towards death were also seen as *poroi*, “opportunities.” The noose of fate at a *kairos* is drawn tight by a God; its transformation is a loosening which is equally a God's gift. But the loosening implies another binding, an imaginative binding related to the Mystery Cults whose initiates “put on the circle of the Gods”. This linking of ends and beginnings, a “crowning” of the psyche is experienced by the initiate as the act of putting on a new fate.

Synchronicity and the House of Dreams

The keys to the “enlightening” process at critical moment are the *symbola* or *synthemata*, the unique divinatory images of the Gods. Each of these divinatory images is a *kairos* which focuses the God's “ray” to transform our imagination. These images were thought to inhabit the world at its crossings, in the things which cross our path and are knotted into our fate. Dream, compulsion, symptom, sickness, fantasy are signs of fated encounters, psychic knots where the individual is bound to an immortal. Each is a “rupture in time,” the entrance to an imaginal world.

Here the practice of divination crosses into the zone of the uncanny, the Land of the Dead, linking us to an invisible community, a line of ancestors stretching back to the great Dream Animals and the Primal Images. When we engage in the drama of divination and its performative linguistic act, the shift in our awareness sends a wave towards the future and another towards the past, so that past, present and future are bound together. Past and future exist simultaneously with our time, a “non-locality” where all points in space-time are in touch with all other points. This is the place where the invisible world and the visible one conjoin in the mystery that Jung called synchronicity, a mastery that is a healing of religious experience. By enacting an image here, we heal time. We enter the House of Dreams, joining the present to past and future in a new and living relation.

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